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ABSTRACT

Uniqueness theory suggests that individuals are most comfortable with the thought that they are moderately different or unique from others. To test whether individuals with a high need for uniqueness are perceived as being different from those with a low need for uniqueness, 144 college students participated in a two-part study. In part one, subjects completed an attitude survey and several personality scales including Snyder and Fromkin's Need for Uniqueness Scale (NUS). They were then scheduled for one of 48 three-person discussion groups and assigned to one of three conditions: (1) no-feedback; (2) uniqueness-depriving feedback; or (3) uniqueness-enhancing feedback. In part two of the study, subjects reviewed their responses to the attitude survey (which for subjects in feedback groups now contained the uniqueness-relevant feedback), and then completed a manipulation check questionnaire. Subjects then participated in a 20-minute discussion of issues from the attitude survey. They then rated the behavior and personality of each participant including their own. An analysis of results indicated that false feedback altered subjects' perceptions of their similiarity to the average college student, but not their group behaviors, as rated by group participants. No-feedback subjects maintained the perception of their own difference. Persons with high NUS scores tended to be low in public self-consciousness and social anxiety, and to be rated as more extraverted, talkative, persuasive, and dissimilar from other students. The findings suggest that need for uniqueness influences individual behavior in group settings. (JAC)

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Title

The Effects of Uniqueness-Relevant Feedback and Strength of Need for Uniqueness on the Social Behaviors and Perceptions of Individual Group Discussants

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Abstract

Several predictions derived from uniqueness theory were tested in a group discussion context. A review of previous tests of uniqueness theory revealed that generalizability of reactions to uniqueness-relevant feedback beyond the traditional conformity paradigm is unknown. Also, previous attempts to validate the Need for Uniqueness Scale have fallen short of providing strong support for hypothesized personality differences between individuals with respectively strong or weak needs to perceive themselves as unique. Further, previous studies have not shown that the Need for Uniqueness Scale may be used for predicting differences in social behaviors. The results of the present investigation suggest that the Need for Uniqueness Scale is valid and that strength of need for uniqueness systematically influences individual behavior in group settings. Findings also suggest that the effects of uniqueness-relevant feedback found in previous studies using the conformity paradigm may not generalize to other social settings.

Introduction and Predictions

The fundamental assumptions of uniqueness theory were outlined by Fromkin (1968). According to Fromkin, individuals are most comfortable with the thought that they are moderately different from others, i.e., are moderately unique. Individuals, according to uniqueness theory, do not like to think that they are very highly similar or very highly dissimilar from others. When the environment delivers feedback to the individual that he/she is highly (dis)similar to others, the theory predicts that he/she will engage in cognitive and/or behavioral actions aimed at re-establishing the sense that he/she is only moderately similar.

The vast majority of the empirical tests of uniqueness theory may be classified as some variation on the traditional conformity paradigm in which individuals are given an opportunity to agree or disagree with the expressed opinions or choices of others (often confederates). In such an experimental setting, recipients of uniqueness-depriving feedback (feedback indicating very high levels of similarity between the individual and members of his/her peer group), have been found to be much more likely than individuals not receiving such feedback to disagree (not conform) with the opinions or choices of others (see Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). A single study (Duval, 1972) found, in addition, that recipients of uniqueness-enhancing feedback (indicating high levels of dissimilarity between the individual and other members of his/her peer group) are more likely to agree (conform) with the opinions or choices of others. While this latter finding is consistent with Fromkin's (1968) reasoning, the generalizability of finding is unknown since uniqueness-enhancing feedback had only been utilized in a single study. In addition, it is unknown if uniqueness-relevant feedback would have similar impact outside of the conformity paradigm.

Fromkin (1968) also theorized that there are individual differences

in the need to perceive oneself as a unique person. The self-perception of being at least moderately unique is very important to some individuals and much less important to others (i.e., some people will actively defy being "a face in the crowd" while others are not uncomfortable with the thought of not being different from others). In order to tap these individual differences, Snyder and Fromkin (1977) developed (and partially validated) the Need for Uniqueness (NUS) Scale. Initial validation studies indicated that persons with high scores on the scale tend to perceive themselves as being less similar to members of their peer groups than do persons with lower scores on the scale. Friends of persons completing the scale have also been shown to be more likely to describe persons with high scores as being more dissimilar from others than persons with low scores. In all of these studies, only the general similarity or dissimilarity of the individuals completing the scale were rated using one or two item questionnaires. However, the findings do suggest that the scale is capable of tapping the individual differences that Fromkin (1968) initially hypothesized. Still, since only the general (dis)similarity of individuals to others has been assessed in these studies, there is no real empirical evidence indicating that persons with higher (or lower) scores on the NUS possess all the characteristics that Snyder and Fromkin (1980) use to describe individuals with stronger (or weaker) needs to perceive themselves as unique persons.

Relative to persons with weak needs to perceive themselves as unique, persons with stronger uniqueness needs are described by Snyder and Fromkin (1980) as being: a) less concerned about how others react to their actions, b) more willing to publicly defend their beliefs, choices, or actions, c) less likely to always follow traditional rules, d) more independent, e) more likely to disagree with others' opinions, f) more talkative in social situations, and g) more comfortable with the thought of being different from

others. From this list of characteristics, the authors of the present investigation predicted that if the Need for Uniqueness accurately measures individual differences in the strength of the need for uniqueness, then persons with high NUS scores, relative to persons with low NUS scores should generally be more active, assertive, dominant, argumentative, persuasive, and talkative in social settings. Furthermore, relative to persons with low NUS scores, persons with high NUS scores should be more likely to be (or appear to be) close-minded, self-assured, and insensitive to others' opinions. The expected assertiveness, insensitivity, and talkativeness of persons with high NUS scores should cause them to be seen by others as being more extraverted, independent, and dislikeable than persons with low NUS scores. We reasoned that the combination of all of these factors should cause persons who socialize with persons with high NUS scores to see them as being different from others.

Again, while Snyder and Fromkin (1980) speculate that specific personality differences exist between persons with stronger and weaker uniqueness needs, attempts to empirically validate these differences had only focused on the general similarity of each personality type to the general peer group. That is, no previous investigation had shown that the specific differences cited by Snyder and Fromkin (1980) actually exist. One of the purposes of the present investigation, then, was to test whether individuals with high NUS scores are a) described (or describe themselves) differently than persons with low NUS scores, b) described (or describe themselves) as possessing the characteristic that Snyder and Fromkin (1980) use to depict this type of personality. Two hypotheses stated that the (self-)descriptions of participants with high NUS scores should be significantly different from the (self-)description of participants with low NUS scores. The second hypothesis stated that the (self-)descriptions of participants (with high and

NUS scores) should be consistent with Snyder and Fromkin's (1980) depictions of personalities of persons with strong and weak uniqueness needs.

The authors knew of no research, other than the previous validation studies (see Snyder and Fromkin, 1980) that had used the NUS scale to predict behavioral differences of individuals in social settings. However, the personality differences said by Snyder and Fromkin to exist between persons with strong and weak uniqueness needs (outlined above), led us to reason that persons with high NUS scores should generally act similar to recipients of uniqueness-depriving feedback while persons with low NUS scores should generally mimic the actions of recipients of uniqueness-depriving feedback. This caused the authors to predict that there should be at least an additive effect (if not an interactive effect) between the recipients of uniqueness-relevant feedback and standing on the NUS scale. That is, persons with high NUS scores were expected to show the strongest reactions to uniqueness-depriving feedback (were expected to be most assertive, argumentative, talkative, etc.), while subjects with low NUS scores were expected to manifest the strongest reactions to the uniqueness-enhancing feedback (i.e., were expected to be most agreeable, least argumentative, etc.).

In summary, both the uniqueness-relevant feedback and NUS scores were expected to influence the behavior of individuals during an experimental social encounter with others. Systematic behavioral differences were expected to be strong enough to be detected by the other people involved in the social encounters.

Method

One hundred forty-four introductory psychology students participated in a two-part study. In Part One, they completed an attitude survey, and several retitled personality scales (i.e., Self-Monitoring, Locus of Control, Extraversion, Public-Private Self-Consciousness, and the Need for Uniqueness (NUS) scale). Following this, participants were scheduled for one of 48 three person discussion groups.

Between Part One and Part Two, groups were randomly assigned to conditions (Feedback and No Feedback) and individuals within the Feedback groups were randomly assigned to receive uniqueness-depriving or uniqueness-enhancing feedback. False feedback indicating either high levels of similarity or dissimilarity between the subjects' own attitudes and the attitudes of the average college student was delivered on the attitude survey that the subject completed during Part One.

At the start of Part Two, subjects reviewed their responses to the attitude survey they had previously completed (which for subjects in feedback groups now contained the uniqueness-relevant feedback). They then completed a manipulation check questionnaire and proceeded on to a 20 minute discussion of a series of issues from the attitude survey. Following the discussion period, all subjects completed a questionnaire which asked them to rate the behaviors of each participant during the discussion (including themselves) and the personality of each participant (including themselves).

All subjects were at all times during Part Two unaware of the type of feedback that had been received by other persons in their discussion group and of the standing of themselves and their fellow discussants on the Need for Uniqueness Scale.

Results

The analyses performed on the manipulation check questions were all highly significant and indicated that the false feedback predictably altered subjects' perceptions of the extent of similarity between their own attitudes and those of the average college student. No feedback subjects maintained the perception of being moderately different from the average student.

A median split was performed on the scores of participants on the Need for Uniqueness Scale in order to classify subjects as being high or low in the Need for Uniqueness. The median and standard deviation of these scores were virtually identical to those reported in previous validation studies (see Snyder and Fromkin, 1980). The scores of the NUS were correlated with the scores (and subscale scores) of the other personality measures. Only two significant correlations were found (see Table 1) between NUS scores and scores on two subscales from the Public-Private Self-Consciousness scale. Both the Social Anxiety and Public-Self-Consciousness subscale scores were found to be negatively related to scores on the NUS. Both of these correlations should have been anticipated in that Snyder and Fromkin (1980) describe persons with a strong need for uniqueness as being unafraid to express their opinion in public settings, even if negative reactions from listeners are expected. In brief, the fact that persons with high NUS scores tend to be low in public self-consciousness and social anxiety is quite consistent with Snyder and Fromkin's depiction of the characteristics of persons with high NUS scores.

Fellow group members rated the behaviors and personality of each individual participant. The feedback manipulation had no impact on the behavioral ratings. However, relative to no feedback subjects, recipients of uniqueness-depriving feedback tended to be rated by fellow group members as having more domineering and independent personalities. Also, related to no feedback sub-

TABLE 1

Correlations Between the Scores of the Personality Scales and Subscales.

(Sub)scale:	Extr	Neur	Lie	LOC	PrSC	PuSC	SA	SM
NUS	.10	.07	-.11	.12	-.09	-.21[a]	-.22[a]	.11
Extr		.60[b]	-.17[a]	.66[b]	.04	.27[b]	-.21[a]	.57[b]
Neur			-.18[a]	.76[b]	.25[a]	.54[b]	.22[a]	.50[b]
Lie				-.15	.14	-.18[a]	-.13	-.17[a]
LOC					.14	.44[b]	.10	.49[b]
PrSC						.34[b]	.11	.21[a]
PuSC							.36[b]	.39[b]
SA								00

Key:

a - $p < .05$

b - $p < .01$

NUS - Need for Uniqueness

Extr - Extraversion

SM - Self-Monitoring

Lie - Lie

LOC - Locus of Control

PrSC - Private Self-Consciousness

PuSC - Public Self-Consciousness

SA - Social Anxiety

jects, recipients of uniqueness-enhancing feedback were rated by fellow group members as being more friendly and similar to other students. Thus, although the manipulation check questions revealed that the uniqueness-relevant feedback altered the perceptions of the individuals' sense of uniqueness, this cognitive modification apparently did not bring about a significant predictable, corresponding change in individual behavior that could be systematically detected by fellow group members. While uniqueness-depriving feedback had been shown to be systematically related to behavior in conformity paradigms, it was not found to have a general influence on social behaviors in a more natural social setting.

Standing on the Need for Uniqueness Scale, however, was found to be related to the total contribution of individuals to the discussion as well as to the majority of the personality ratings of individual group members (see Table 2). The personality ratings received by persons with high and low NUS scores are highly consistent with Snyder and Fromkin's (1980) description of the difference between these two types of individuals.

Each participant was also asked to rate himself/herself on the same personality dimensions that he/she used to rate his/her fellow discussants. As is shown in Table 3, significant differences were obtained on the majority of the dimensions showing that persons with high NUS scores tend to rate themselves differently than do persons with low NUS scores. Furthermore, these self-perceived differences are very consistent with the ratings that fellow discussants made of persons with high and low scores. Also, these self-perceived differences are largely consistent with Snyder and Fromkin's (1980) description of the differences between these two types of personalities.

The feedback manipulation had no impact on the self-descriptions with the exception of the final dimension (similarity to other students). Here, recipients of depriving feedback rated themselves as being more similar to other

Table 2

Ratings of High and Low Need for

Uniqueness Subjects by Fellow Group Members

Dimension	Low NUS	High NUS	$p \leq$
self-assured	2.33	2.28	N.S.
extraverted	2.75	2.57	.02
talkative	2.67	2.34	.03
persuasive	3.36	3.07	.09
agreeable	2.32	2.79	.005
calm	2.25	2.36	N.S.
active	2.58	2.88	N.S.
dominant	3.55	3.13	.02
open-minded	2.73	3.18	.05
assertive	2.91	3.05	N.S.
self-conscious	4.08	4.32	N.S.
sensitive	2.98	3.03	.06
independent	2.75	2.45	.06
likeable	1.69	2.34	.11
similar to others	2.56	3.00	.09

Note: Lower scores indicate greater possession of the trait dimensions.

Summary: Fellow group members systematically tended to rate subjects with high NUS scores (relative to subjects with lower NUS scores) as being more extraverted, talkative, persuasive, disagreeable, dominant, close-minded, insensitive, independent, dislikeable, and dissimilar from most other students during the group discussion. These ratings are consistent with Snyder & Fromkin's (1980) depictions of these two personality types.

Table 3

The Perceptions of Subjects With

High and Low NUS Scores of the Extent to

Which They Personally Possess the Following Traits

Dimension	Low NUS	High NUS	$p \leq$
self-assured	2.39	2.07	.06
extraverted	2.61	2.31	.05
talkative	2.4i	1.93	.01
persuasive	3.09	2.57	.02
agreeable	2.32	2.69	.07
calm	2.35	2.34	N.S.
active	2.36	1.97	.06
dominant	3.15	2.46	.0001
open-minded	2.40	2.29	N.S.
assertive	2.87	2.00	.0001
self-conscious	3.69	4.00	N.S.
sensitive	2.61	2.56	N.S.
independent	2.41	1.94	.01
friendly	1.77	1.75	N.S.
likeable	1.97	1.91	N.S.
similar to others	2.92	3.01	N.S.

Note: Lower scores indicate greater possession of the trait dimensions.

Summary: Relative to subjects with low NUS scores, subjects with high NUS scores tended to rate themselves as being more self-assured, extraverted, talkative, persuasive, disagreeable, active, dominant, assertive, and independent. These findings are largely consistent with Snyder & Fromkin's (1980) descriptions of the differences between these two personality types.

students than did the recipients of enhancing and no feedback. This pattern of means on this last dimension is consistent with the pattern on the manipulation check questions and seems to show that this final dimension served as an additional manipulation check.

Summary and Conclusions

In this investigation, standing on the Need for Uniqueness Scale appeared to have a much greater and pervasive influence on the social behaviors of research participants than did the reception of uniqueness-relevant feedback. Uniqueness-relevant feedback had little influence on the rated behaviors or personalities of individual feedback recipients. However, strength of need for uniqueness (as measured by the NUS) was associated with systematic differences in the personality ratings and self-descriptions of the individuals who participated in the study. Since the personality ratings of individual participants were based on the group discussion behaviors that they exhibited, the findings suggest that strength of need for uniqueness may be systematically related to behavior in social settings. The findings also suggest that the influence of uniqueness-relevant feedback on individual social behavior not generalize far beyond the traditional comformity paradigm in which the number of possible behavioral reactions to the feedback is severely constrained.

Because the scores on the NUS are largely uncorrelated with the scores of other (sub)scales commonly used to predict social behaviors and because the personality descriptions of individuals with high and low are highly consistent with Snyder and Fromkin's (1980) descriptions of the differences between persons with stronger and weaker uniqueness needs, there is evidence that the NUS is valid and can be used to predict individual behavior in social settings.

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